

Message Text

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PAGE 01 ISLAMA 05806 01 OF 02 061349Z
ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 NEAE-00 SSO-00 NSCE-00
USIE-00 INRE-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15
DHA-02 IO-13 SSM-03 EB-07 TRSE-00 /087 W
-----061355Z 083117 /43

O P 061145Z JUN 77

FM AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 2095
INFO AMEMBASSY ANKARA PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY COLOMBO PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY DACCA PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY KABUL PRIORITY
AMCONSUL KARACHI PRIORITY
AMCONSUL LAHORE PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY PARIS PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY TEHRAN PRIORITY
CINCPAC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 ISLAMABAD 5806

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, PK
SUBJECT: GOVERNMENT-OPPOSITION TALKS: HOPEFUL BEGINNINGS

1. SUMMARY: WITH A PROMISING START JUNE 3, BOTH SIDES
APPEAR COMMITTED, AT LEAST FOR THE TIME BEING, TO SETTLING
THEIR DIFFERENCES AT THE CONFERENCE TABLE. MORE PRISONERS
HAVE BEEN RELEASED AND OPPOSITION COVERAGE HAS INCREASED
IN THE MEDIA. PNA LEADER MUFTI MAHMUD HAS UNDERScoreD
THE OPPOSITION'S DESIRE FOR A SETTLEMENT, WHILE CONCEDING
THAT MUCH HARD BARGAINING LIES AHEAD. THE GOVERNMENT
POSITION MAY HAVE BEEN PREVIEWED BY H.K. BURKI, WHO WROTE
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IN THE PAKISTAN TIMES THAT SOME TIME WILL BE REQUIRED
BEFORE NEW ELECTIONS CAN BE HELD. DESPITE THE FACT THE
MAIN ISSUES REMAIN TO BE DISCUSSED, PROGRESS OF THE TALKS
SO FAR, HOWEVER MODEST, HAS RAISED HOPES FOR A PEACEFUL
SETTLEMENT. END SUMMARY.

2. ATMOSPHERE IS ENCOURAGAING AS BOTH THE GOVERNMENT

AND THE OPPOSITION SEEK TO PURSUE THE NEGOTIATIONS SUCCESSFULLY LAUNCHED ON JUNE 3. BOTH SIDES APPEAR ANXIOUS TO CONTINUE THE TALKS, WHICH HAVE NOT YET RUN INTO ANY SERIOUS SNAGS. BHUTTO HAS BEGUN TO FOLLOW UP ON HIS AGREEMENT TO RELEASE PRISONERS HELD UNDER SECTION 144, WITH 500 PERSONS REPORTEDLY SET FREE ALREADY IN RAWALPINDI DIVISION. MORE ARE EXPECTED TO BE LET OUT SOON. THERE HAVE BEEN SOME COMPLAINTS THAT THE GOVERNMENT HAS NOT MOVED FAST ENOUGH, INCLUDING A STATEMENT BY PNA LEADER SHAH AHMAD NOORANI ON JUNE 5 THAT ONLY SEVEN PERSONS HAVE BEEN FREED IN KARACHI. SO FAR, HOWEVER, THE GOVERNMENT APPEARS TO BE ACTING IN GOOD FAITH ON THIS SENSITIVE ISSUE. PRESS COVERAGE OF THE OPPOSITION HAS INCREASED, HELPING TO SOOTHE ANOTHER SORE POINT. BOTH THE PAKISTAN TIMES AND GOVERNMENT CONTROLLED URDU PRESS ARE WIDELY REPORTING THE NEGOTIATIONS, INCLUDING STATEMENTS BY MUFTI MAHMUD AND OTHER PNA LEADERS.

3. TALKING WITH REPORTERS BEFORE A PNA GENERAL COUNCIL MEETING IN ISLAMABAD JUNE 5, MUFTI MAHMUD AFFIRMED THAT BOTH SIDES ARE IN A "GOOD MOOD." HE EMPHASIZED TYGAT THE PNA HOPES TO FIND A SOLUTION WITHIN THE CONSTITUTION, (REFERENCE HERE IN PART PROBABLY REFLECTS THE OPPOSITION'S DEMAND THAT FRESH ELECTIONS BE HELD BEFORE AUGUST 1977, DATE ORIGINALLY STIPULATED BY THE CONSTITUTION.) NONE OF THE OPPOYXTION'S DEMANDS, HE MAINTAINED, WOULD REQUIRE A CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT TO FULFILL. ASKED IF THE PNA WOULD ALLOW THE GOVERNMENT MORE THAN THE CONSTITUTIONAL LIMIT OF 90 DAYS FOR COMPLETING THE ELECTORAL PROCESS IN

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CASE THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY IS DISSOLVED, MUFTI REPLIED THAT THEY WOULD NOT. WE HAVE NOTHING TO GIVE, HE SAID, AND EVERYTHING TO TAKE. IN ANSWER TO VARIOUS OTHER QUESTIONS ABOUT THE PNA NEGOTIATING STAND, MUFTI EMPHASIZED THAT THERE WERE NO DIFFERENCES AMONG THE PNA LEADERS. HE SAID THAT THERE COULD BE VARIATIONS IN THE WAY OF THINKING, BUT THE STAND WAS ONE. HE EXPRESSED HOPE THAT DISCUSSIONS IN THE NEXT DAY OR TWO WOULD RESULT IN LIFTING OF MARTIAL LAW. THE ISSUE OF THE EMERGENCY, HE SAID, WOULD BE DISCUSSED LATER A-LONG WITH ELECTIONS.

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 ISLAMABAD 5806

4. IN AN ARTICLE IN THE PAKISTAN TIMES JUNE 5 ENTITLED
"BETTER LATE THAN NEVER," H.K. BURKI PROVIDES WHAT MAY
BE THE GOVERNMENT'S OUTLOOK FOR THE NEGOTIATIONS.
ACCORDING TO BURKI, THE RECONSTITUTION OF THE ELECTION
COMMISSION HAS ALREADY BEEN ACCEPTED IN PRINCIPAL AS
EVIDENCED BY THE DEPARTURE OF THE CHIEF ELECTION
COMMISSIONER ON SICK LEAVE. BHUTTO'S RESIGNATION, HE
CLAIMS, HAS BEEN TAKEN OUT OF THE OPPOSITION'S HANDS BY
THE PRIME MINISTER'S CALLING FOR A REFERENDUM.
IN DISCUSSING THE KEY ISSUE OF FRESH ELECTIONS, BURKI
ASSERTS THAT BHUTTO WILL BE MAKING A MAJOR AND UNPRECEDENTED
CONSESSION. HE NOTES, HOWEVER, THAT THE
PEOPLE NEED SUFFICIENT TIME TO RECOVER FROM THE AGITATION OF
THE PAST THREE MONTHS BEFORE FRESH ELECTIONS CAN BE HELD AND
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WARNS THAT "THE POWERFUL SNOUT OF THE ELEPHANTS" (A REFERENCE
TO US INTERFERENCE) MAY CONTINUE TO NUDGE THEIR
COLLABORATORS. IN ADDITION, THE PZLPLE WOULD EXPECT THE
PRIME MINISTER TO HOLD FRESH ELECTIONS UNDER TIGHT GROUND
RULES TO PREVENT ANOTHER OUTBURST OF ANARCHY.

5. WHILE NEITHER SIDE APPEARS CLOSE TO REACHING AGREEMENT

ABOUT TIMING OF AND MODALITIES FOR NEW ELECTIONS, THE
GENERALLY OPTIMISTIC TONE OF THE NEGOTIATIONS SO FAR HAS
RAISED HOPE AMONG MANY PAKISTANIS THAT A PEACEFUL
SETTLEMENT MAY BE FOUND. NO DOORS HAVE BEEN
SLAMMED SHUT; NO OPTIONS FORECLGRED. HOWEVER,
THE DIFFICULT DECISIONS LAY AHEAD. MUCH WILL DEPEND ON
BHUTTO'S PERCEPTION OF HIS BARGAINING POSITION. IF HE THINKS
HE CAN AVOID ELECTIONS ALTOGETHER AND SURVIVE POLITICALLY,
THE TALKS WILL BREAK DOWN. ON THE OTHER HAND, IF HE SINCERELY
ACCEPTS THE IDEA OF ELECTIONS IN PRINCIPLE AND BEGINS
NEGOTIATIONS OVER THE TIMING AND MODALITIES AS THE BURKI
ARTICLE SUGGESTS, THE POSSIBILITY REMAINS THAT, AS DIFFICULT
AS THE ROAD WILL BE, A COMPROMISE FORMULA CAN BE REACHED.
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